

Ten steps in different directions

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"People suffer not only from objective hardships of the transitional period, when the new state, the new system of values is formed... People suffer not less from incompetence, bureaucracy, crime, inconsistent actions of power structures, hidden and overt resistance of anti-reform forces." ("Ten Steps of the PDP". Election Agenda of the People's Democratic Party)

PDP and Hromada: Striking Similarities

Comparing pre-election pledges made by the "party of power" with those of its most vehement critics, ex-prime minister Pavlo Lazarenko's Hromada, one can't but notice the similarities between the two. Both of the parties claim to have the know-how for overcoming the crisis and achieving a decent standard of living for Ukraine's people and promise to "take responsibility" when they come to power. Both pledge to ensure economic stability and growth, provide jobs, salaries, pensions, social security benefits, pay back lost savings, ensure equal opportunities, and develop everything which can be developed. Both are cautious not to alienate any potential voter by making their agendas too radical, be it privatization of land or the issue of property, or relations with other states. Both claim to take strong measures against corruption and crime, protect national manufacturers and open new markets.

Contrary to the wide-spread opinion, the PDP is not entirely "the party of power" or, more exactly, not the only force that may be referred as a "party of power". It consists of 30.7% of higher- and medium-ranking apparatchiks, 27% of entrepreneurs, 2.1% of financiers and 40.2% of assorted others. The number of professional bureaucrats in the party list is less than in the Agrarian party (41) and equal to the number of apparatchiks in the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh (31) - a party that has traditionally stressed its opposition to the authorities.

Meanwhile, the PDP's agenda is more pro-reform and realistic than that of their rivals. There are no exact figures, except the promised improvement in 1999 - which will be strongly needed if President Kuchma does intend to win the second term. There is no visible effort to find a scapegoat for the current problems. There are no calls for reprivatization or nationalization of property. The sensitive language issue and relations with Russia are simply omitted from the agenda. And yet, like many other parties, the PDP displays the lack of a targeted message, which may result in the lack of "its own" voters.

Step by Step

"Step 1. Towards Stability and Growth"

Usual pre-election mantra: "the people must be the real carrier of the power", "economy must not be prey of political populism", "deterioration of the standard of living and economic decrease will be halted", "stimulation of effective production", "support for the national manufacturer" (though, only the one who is able to compete). A bureaucratic gobbledegook for an ordinary voter: "active budget and credit-monetary policy". Incredible promises like "the taxation policy will stimulate, and not strangle" or "we'll bring back the national capital from abroad by economic methods". Unlike many, the PDP is not afraid to promise "development of market relations" or mention international loans, though "only on the conditions that are beneficial for Ukraine." Well aware of the criticism addressed to the President and his ex-prime minister for bringing too many apparatchiks from Dnipropetrovsk to power corridors in Kyiv, the PDP promises to pursue a regional policy as a "factor of effective development of the state".

"Step 2. Towards the Owner"

One of the bravest and the most idealistic points. "There's no "nobody's" property", "further reform of the forms of ownership", "every citizen is an owner", "privatization is not only for the privatizers", "state property is the people's property, and not a piece for a thief".

"Step 3. Towards the Peasant"

Represents the ability of compromise on one of the most sensitive issues. The slogans "land is the property of those who work on it" and "long-term special rate loans to peasants for development of production" sound quite socialist and by no means can be regarded as revolutionary calls for privatization of land. Two other slogans are likely to appeal to potential rural voters: "No to robbing peasants by means of dumping purchase prices! Our products are better than foreign ones."

"Step 4. Towards Global Economy"

Declaring Ukraine's national interests - something which remains rather vague for voters as well as for many specialists - to be the utmost priority, the PDP pledges to prevent the Ukrainian market from becoming the world's "garbage disposal place". "Ukrainian spacecraft, aircraft, devices, ships [note the list!] must be profitably sold abroad." "Foreign energy sources are harness on the Ukrainian neck! We'll explore our own!" "More partners, good and different!" "If we leave world markets, our place will be taken by others!" The vow to "make Ukraine a global center of trade and international communications" suggests that the PDP is going to stay in power much longer than the regular four-year parliamentary term.

"Step 5. Towards the State With a Human Face"

Traditional. And practically lost - every party claims to pay off overdue salaries, pensions, scholarships, other social payments and provide social security guarantees to large families, the retired, the disabled, the Chernobyl victims. "We know how to give those debts back to people fast," declare the authors of the PDP's agenda. Why don't they tell the secret to Prime Minister Pustovoitenko, number 1 in the NPD list? Other campaign pledges include raising pensions to 70% of an average salary level, paying back citizens' savings destroyed by the hyperinflation of past years, making the rich to pay taxes to support the poor, development of small and medium business, creation of new jobs, free housing to low-income families, social partnership as a method of public compromise between employers and employees, maintaining free state-owned medical service while developing private and insurance-based medical assistance. The appeal to the "middle class", accompanied by the above vows, evidently designed to impress low-income voters, may fail to secure the NDP enough votes.

"Step 6. Towards the Society of Free and Responsible Citizens"

Replica of constitutional provisions for a human being as a supreme value, accompanied with promises of civil society, local self-governance, freedom of NGOs and the media, and public control over power-holders. To anybody familiar with the current situation the pledges sound cynical or at least naive.

"Step 7. Towards Spirituality"

This includes pledges of state support for science, education and culture and promises of "equal chances in life" to every citizen. Both state-owned educational, art and culture institutions will have the right to exist, says the agenda. The PDP declares freedom of confession and states that "confiscated church property should be given back to temples," thus, ensuring long-lasting inter-confessional property disputes between at least three mainstream Orthodox churches and a number of other confessions.

"Step 8. Towards the Society of 'Clean Hands'"

"Criminals do not like us and will never like us, as the PDP does not have a compromise with them. Corruption, Banditism, all manifestations of organized crime is a national security threat, a threat to the mere existence of Ukraine," declares the agenda, pledging to establish the rule of law and make Ukraine "unfavorable for proliferation of crime". In a brave pre-election gesture - urgently needed indeed but unlikely to be supported by many of elected, as well as appointed officials - the PDP vows to abolish the immunity of state officials of all ranks and members of the parliament responsible for violation of the law. The pledge to stop the arrangement whereby some are "more equal than the other", especially if made by those who are the "more equal", does not sound convincing.

"Step 9. Towards the Future"

Addressed to younger voters, this point promises "real opportunities in state and political life", gradual transfer from conscription to contract military service, "active work of social services for the young", special-interest loans for education, retraining, purchase of housing. From the left-wingers, the PDP agenda borrowed the pledge to build "regional recreation centers for orphans and young victims of the Chornobyl disaster", and to "develop physical culture and sports". "We will not make you listen to our music. Your creative preferences are your own business," declares the agenda, and the paragraph sounds the most likely to be implemented.

"Step 10. Towards the Due Place in the World"

Designed to suit preferences of any kind of voters, this step promises to maintain the current "multivector" policy (seen by many as the failure to set foreign policy priorities) by developing "friendly relations with neighbor states, primarily the CIS, gradual integration into the European and global community, international and regional organizations, active participation in preventing armed conflicts, support for transformation of NATO into a collective security system" and "insisting on the observance of security and territorial integrity guarantees to Ukraine by the world community, primarily, the nuclear states."

In addition to the ten urgent steps, the NPD claims to guarantee the following: - "the economy will overcome the crisis, the gradual increase of the standards of living of the whole people will begin in 1999; - unemployment will decrease...; - the level of earnings will correspond with the cost of living; - the social stratification will be halted by means of formation of the middle class; - wholesale and retail prices will be stabilized, the reasonable parity of prices for agrarian and industrial products will be maintained; - ruination of the system of education, health care, science [and] culture will be stopped; - crime will be harnessed, law and order will be enforced, and the Law will triumph."

Officially, the Agenda is signed by Anatoly Matvienko, the PDP's formal chairman and up to recently, a regional politician hardly known to anyone beyond the circle of politicians and professional political commentators. At least this may spare unsophisticated voters the trouble of asking what prevented Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko and a number of other power-holding members of the PDP from making the difference while in power.